

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
White River Field Office  
73544 Hwy 64  
Meeker, CO 81641

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**NUMBER:** CO-110-2004-204-EA

**CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER** (optional): Lease COC62041

**PROJECT NAME:** Independence Unit T52X-29G1

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** Sec. 29, T. 3 S., R.96 W., 6<sup>th</sup> PM

**APPLICANT:** ExxonMobil

**ISSUES AND CONCERNS** (optional):

**DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:**

***Background/Introduction:***

**Proposed Action:** ExxonMobil has submitted a Notice of Staking followed by an Application for Permit to Drill (APD) for the T52X-29G1 well. The pad for this well would be developed in such a manner as to allow them to drill up to 9 wells, and would comprise approximately 4.6 acres (approximately 400 feet by 500 feet). Access to the site would require the upgrading of approximately 3.4 miles of road (approximately 25 feet of additional width, or 10 acres of new disturbance) generally running along a ridgeline, and the construction of approximately 1650 feet of new road (approximately 40 feet wide, or 1.5 acres of new disturbance). The applicant has not proposed any culvert or cattleguard locations. The APD includes a proposed pipeline route, approximately 8 miles in length, from the proposed well, north to the T57X-19G1 well location in Gardenhire Gulch. Due to an identified need to determine potential alternate routes, and whether segments of the pipeline can/should be buried, the pipeline route will not be addressed in this EA. Total disturbance of the proposed pad and access roads would be approximately 16.1 acres, more or less.

**No Action Alternative:** Under the no action alternative, the APD would be rejected. No surface disturbing activities would take place.

**ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD:**

**NEED FOR THE ACTION:** ExxonMobil is the holder of oil and gas lease COC62041. They are pursuing the unitization of this and other leases, which requires an obligation well. The T52X-29G1 well is proposed for meeting that requirement.

**PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW:** The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP).

Date Approved: July 1, 1997

Decision Number/Page: M1; page 2-5 in the Record of Decision

Decision Language: Make federal oil and gas resources available for leasing and development in a manner that provides reasonable protection for other resource values.

**AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES / MITIGATION MEASURES:**

**STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH:** In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in specific elements listed below:

**CRITICAL ELEMENTS**

**AIR QUALITY**

*Affected Environment:* There are no special designation air sheds or non-attainment areas nearby that would be affected by the proposed action. During periods of low precipitation, air quality in the area of the proposed action is often diminished by dust caused by human disturbance.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The proposed action would result in short term, local impacts to air quality during and after construction, due to dust being blown into the air. After adequate vegetation is reestablished, blowing dust should return to pre-construction levels.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* No increase in dust will occur.

*Mitigation:* Require water spreading on the road surfaces to control fugitive dust and to help minimize short-term impacts.

## **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

*Affected Environment:* the proposed well pad and access road route have been inventoried at the Class III (100% pedestrian) level (Bott 2004, Compliance Dated 10/18/2004, Jennings 1974, Compliance Dated 7/22/1974) with no cultural resources located in the access road or well pad areas.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The proposed action does not appear to impact any known cultural resources.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no new impacts to cultural resources under the No Action Alternative.

*Mitigation:* 1. The operator is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the operator as to:

- whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
- the mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not necessary)
- a timeframe for the AO to complete an expedited review under 36 CFR 800-11 to confirm, through the State Historic Preservation Officer, that the findings of the AO are correct and that mitigation is appropriate.

If the operator wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the operator will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will then be allowed to resume construction.

2. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g) the holder of this authorization must notify the AO, by telephone, with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), you must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.

## INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES

*Affected Environment:* Noxious weeds in the proposed project area include Russian and spotted knapweed, musk thistle and houndstongue. Most of the occurrences of these weeds are associated with the earthen disturbances created by pipeline and road construction as a result of oil and gas development. The invasive alien cheatgrass also occurs throughout the area, again primarily associated with unvegetated earthen disturbances. Oldland Brothers, the grazing permittees in this area have an aggressive noxious weed management program.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The proposed action will create about 16.1 acres of earthen disturbance which could provide safe sites for the establishment and proliferation of noxious weeds and cheatgrass.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There will be no change from the present situation.

*Mitigation:* Promptly revegetate all disturbed areas including cut and fill slopes and topsoil stockpiles with Native Seed Mix #3. Eradicate all noxious weeds and invasive species using materials and methods approved in advance by the authorized officer.

## MIGRATORY BIRDS

*Affected Environment:* An array of migratory birds, fulfill nesting functions in the project area's predominantly mature pinyon-juniper woodlands from late May through early August. Species associated with these woodland communities are typical and widely represented in the Resource Area and region. Those bird populations identified as having higher conservation interest (i.e., Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, Partners in Flight program) include gray flycatcher, pinyon jay, juniper titmouse, black-throated gray warbler, and violet-green swallow. These birds, too, are well distributed at appropriate densities in this Resource Area's extensive woodland habitats.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* This well is scheduled to be drilled in February 2005 - well in advance of the migratory bird breeding season. Although well drilling and completion activities would likely extend into the nesting season, returning birds would select nest sites based on their tolerance of ongoing activity. Because birds' site tenacity increases through the nesting sequence, it is unlikely that nest failures attributable to activities on the well pad or access road would be elevated beyond normal rates.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no action authorized that would potentially influence migratory bird nesting activities.

*Mitigation:* None.

## **THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)**

*Affected Environment:* There are no special status species known to inhabit or derive important benefit from the project area. Mature pinyon-juniper woodlands in Piceance Basin are known to support a very small breeding population of northern goshawk, a BLM sensitive species, but surveys conducted by BLM in areas potentially influenced by pad and access construction (July 2004) revealed no evidence of past or recent occupation by these birds.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The proposed action would have no conceivable influence on special status animal populations or associated habitats.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no action authorized that would have any influence on special status species.

*Mitigation:* In the event project implementation is delayed beyond April 1, 2005, supplemental woodland raptor surveys in areas potentially influenced by construction and drilling operations would be required prior to initiating surface disturbance.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species:* Although there is no evidence suggesting that northern goshawk use this particular area for breeding activities, these woodlands ostensibly meet the Land Health standards for this BLM sensitive species. Minor widening of the existing ridgeline road and woodland clearing associated with new access (narrow linear 1.5 acre feature) and well pad (5 acres on the margin of the ridgeline stand)) are not inconsistent with small scale perturbation patterns (e.g., fire, insect/disease mortality) within these woodland communities. This project would not substantively decrease woodland habitat continuity or extent or measurably influence the utility of these woodlands for subsequent use by nesting goshawk. Although the project represents incremental intrusion of human activity into previously undeveloped woodland habitats, the proposed action would not contradict continued meeting of the Land Health Standards on a landscape scale.

## **WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID**

*Affected Environment:* There are no known hazardous or other solid wastes on the subject lands. No hazardous materials are known to have been used, stored or disposed of at sites included in the project area.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* No listed or extremely hazardous materials in excess of threshold quantities are proposed for use in this project. While commercial preparations of fuels and lubricants proposed for use may contain some hazardous constituents, they would be stored, used and transported in a manner consistent with applicable laws, and the generation of hazardous wastes would not be anticipated. Solid wastes would be properly disposed of.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* No hazardous or other solid wastes would be generated under the no-action alternative.

*Mitigation:* The operator shall be required to collect and properly dispose of any solid wastes generated by the proposed actions.

## **WATER QUALITY, SURFACE AND GROUND** (includes a finding on Standard 5)

*Affected Environment:* The proposed action has been identified in segment 16; all tributaries to Piceance Creek, including all wetlands, lakes and reservoirs from the source to the confluence with the White River except for specific listings in segments 17-20. A review of the Colorado's 1989 Nonpoint Source Assessment Report (plus updates), the 305(b) report, the 303(d) list and the Unified Watershed Assessment was done to see if any water quality concerns have been identified. All actions are within the White River watershed.

The State has classified this segment as a "Use Protected" reach. Its designated beneficial uses are: Warm Aquatic Life 2, Recreation 2, and Agriculture. The antidegradation review requirements in the Antidegradation Rule are not applicable to waters designated use-protected. For those waters, only the protection specified in each reach will apply. For this reach, minimum standards for three parameters have been listed. These parameters are: dissolved oxygen = 5.0 mg/l, pH = 6.5 - 9.0, Fecal Coliform = 2000/100 ml, and 630/100 ml E. coli. This segment retained its Recreation Class 2 designation after sufficient evidence was received that a Recreation Class 1a use was unattainable.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* One impact that could result from the proposed action would be an increase in sediment transport. Annual runoff from this watershed is dynamic and dependent on some aspects we control, such as the amount of vegetation retained for watershed protection and vegetation density. Depleting the vegetation cover needed to protect watersheds from raindrop impact and runoff could cause short-term erosion problems and increased sedimentation to Piceance Creek and on down to the White River until successful best management practices (BMPs) have been implemented and proven successful. The magnitude of these impacts is dependent on the amount of surface disturbance, climatic conditions during the time the soils are exposed to the elements and the success of the mitigation proposed in the proposed action.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* No impacts from the no-action alternative are anticipated.

*Mitigation:* All disturbed areas including the cut and fill slopes not necessary for production will be promptly recontoured and revegetated using the recommended seed mix in the Vegetation section below.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for water quality:* The water quality of Piceance Creek is well within the criteria set by the state, thus meeting the land health standard. The proposed action will not change this status.

## **CRITICAL ELEMENTS NOT PRESENT OR NOT AFFECTED:**

No ACEC's, flood plains, prime and unique farmlands, Wilderness, or Wild and Scenic Rivers, threatened, endangered or sensitive plants, riparian/wetland communities, or aquatic habitats exist within the area affected by the proposed action. For threatened, endangered and sensitive plant species, riparian/wetland communities, and aquatic habitats the Public Land Health Standards are not applicable since neither the proposed nor the no-action alternative would have any influence on these communities or populations of, or habitats potentially occupied by, special status plants. There are also no Native American religious or environmental justice concerns associated with the proposed action.

## **NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS**

The following elements **must** be addressed due to the involvement of Standards for Public Land Health:

### **SOILS** (includes a finding on Standard 1)

*Affected Environment:* The proposed action is in soils mapping unit #70-Redcreek-Rentsac complex, on slopes 5 to 30 percent. There are no areas delineated as special designations (CSU-1, NSO-1) for the proposed action. This map unit is on mountainsides and ridges. Areas are elongated and are 40 to 300 acres. The native vegetation is mainly pinyon and juniper trees with an understory of shrubs and grasses. Elevation is 6,000 to 7,400 feet. The average annual precipitation is 14 to 18 inches, the average annual air temperature is 42 to 45 degrees F, and the average frost-free period is 85 to 105 days.

The Redcreek soil is shallow and well drained. It formed in residual and eolian material derived dominantly from sandstone. Typically, the surface layer is brown sandy loam about 4 inches thick. The next layer is brown, calcareous sandy loam about 7 inches thick. The underlying material is very pale brown, calcareous channery loam 5 inches thick. Hard sandstone is at a depth of 16 inches. Depth to hard sandstone or hard shale ranges from 10 to 20 inches. Permeability of the Redcreek soil is moderately rapid. Available water capacity is very low. Effective rooting depth is 10 to 20 inches. Runoff is medium, and the hazard of water erosion is moderate to high.

The Rentsac soil is shallow and well drained. It formed in residuum derived dominantly from sandstone. Typically, the upper part of the surface layer is grayish brown channery loam about 5 inches thick. The next layer is brown very channery loam about 4 inches thick. The underlying material is very pale brown extremely flaggy loam 7 inches thick. Hard sandstone is at a depth of 16 inches. Depth to hard sandstone or hard shale ranges from 10 to 20 inches. Permeability of the Rentsac soil is moderately rapid. Available water capacity is very low. Effective rooting depth is 10 to 20 inches. Runoff is medium, and the hazard of water erosion is moderate to high. This map unit is in capability subclass VIe, nonirrigated. It is in Pinyon-Juniper woodland site.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Impacts associated with oil and gas and road development include but are not limited to, loss of topsoil, soil compaction and possible increase in sediment loads to the White River. The primary surface-disturbing impact would be a potential increase in sediment transport from runoff events after the protective vegetative cover has been removed. BMPs used to slow runoff, trap sediment and prepare reclaimed areas for seeding would help reduce soil loss. With the use of these BMPs, impacts are expected to be short in duration, during the construction phase and for a short time after construction until successful reclamation are achieved.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* Impacts are not anticipated from not permitting the proposed action.

*Mitigation:* Additional mitigation above what is already proposed is not necessary.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for upland soils:* Soils at the proposed location do not meet the criteria established in the Public Land Health Standard. The proposed action would not change this status.

## **VEGETATION** (includes a finding on Standard 3)

*Affected Environment:* Vegetation in the area of the proposed project is predominately Pinyon-juniper woodlands with an understory which is dominated by the browse species mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus montanus*) and Utah serviceberry (*Amelanchier utahensis*). This gradually grades into a mixed pinyon/Wyoming big sagebrush plant community with increasing elevation. Except for the immediate ridgetop, slopes are very steep.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* There will be a net disturbance of about 16.1 acres as a result of project implementation. If this disturbance is promptly revegetated as stated in mitigation, there will be no significant negative impact to the affected plant communities.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There will be no change from the present situation.

*Mitigation:* Promptly revegetate all disturbed areas including all cut and fill slopes and topsoil stockpiles with Native Seed mix #3. Seeding rates are PLS (Pure Live Seed) and apply to drill seeding. For broadcast application, double the seeding rate and then harrow to insure seed coverage. The project applicant will be responsible for eradicating cheatgrass and noxious and problem weeds should they occur as a result of the proposed action. The applicant will use materials and methods authorized in advance by the White River Field Manager.

Native Seed Mix # 3 lbs/PLS		
Western wheatgrass (Rosanna)	2	Gravelly 10"-14",
Bluebunch wheatgrass (Secar)	2	Pinyon/Juniper
Thickspike wheatgrass (Critana)	2	Woodland, Stony

Native Seed Mix # 3 lbs/PLS		
Indian ricegrass (Rimrock)	1	Foothills, 147
Fourwing saltbush (Wytana)	1	(Mountain
Utah sweetvetch	.5	Mahogany)
Alternates: Needle and thread, globemallow		

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities* (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial): Plant communities in the project area currently meet the Standard and can be expected to meet the Standard in the future with the applied mitigation.

## **WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL** (includes a finding on Standard 3)

*Affected Environment:* The project area is encompassed by general winter ranges of deer and elk. Elk are capable of using these lands throughout the winter, but deer use is typically most prevalent from October through January and again in April and May.

These mature pinyon-juniper woodlands support relatively low densities of breeding Cooper's and sharp-shinned hawk and long-eared owl. The area potentially influenced by the proposed action was surveyed for woodland nesting raptors by BLM biologists during the 2004 nesting season; no evidence of past or recent raptor nest activity was found. Other small mammals and birds using this area are typical and widely distributed in extensive like habitats across the Resource Area and northwest Colorado; there are no narrowly endemic or highly specialized species known to inhabit those lands potentially influenced by this action.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Big game impacts associated with unregulated vehicle use (i.e., behavioral avoidance and habitat disuse; increased energetic demands during critical timeframes) received prominent address in the White River ROD/RMP. This action would increase local road density slightly (additional 0.3 mile of new access), but since access to Bailey Ridge is privately controlled, there would be little effective long-term increase in the intensity and frequency of road use outside well maintenance regimens.

Long-term reductions in the local availability of woodland cover and woody forage (approximately 6.5 acres) are minor and discountable relative to surrounding resource base. The pad and its location on the edge of the ridgeline stand are consistent with natural perturbation patterns associated with insect/disease infestations and fire and would have no substantive influence on big game or non-game abundance or distribution. The proposed pad is designed to accommodate up to 8 additional wells, which would offer strong advantages in reducing the extent and distribution of woodland conversions attributable to well pad, access, and pipeline construction in adjoining parcels.

Assuming project work is accomplished on-schedule, it is unlikely that areas in close proximity to active drilling or completion operations would be selected by raptors for nesting during the 2005 season. However, in the event project implementation is delayed beyond April 1, 2005, supplemental woodland raptor surveys in areas potentially influenced by construction and drilling operations would be required prior to initiating surface disturbance.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no action authorized that would have potential to influence terrestrial wildlife populations or habitats.

*Mitigation:* In the event project implementation is delayed beyond April 1, 2005, supplemental woodland raptor surveys in areas potentially influenced by construction and drilling operations would be required prior to initiating surface disturbance.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities* (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Aquatic): The landscape surrounding the proposed action currently meets the Land Health Standards for animal communities. Minor widening of the existing ridgeline road and woodland clearing associated with new access (narrow linear 1.5 acre feature) and well pad (5 acres on the margin of the ridgeline stand)) are not inconsistent with small scale perturbation patterns (e.g., fire, insect/disease mortality) within these woodland communities. This project would not substantively decrease woodland habitat continuity or extent or measurably influence the utility of these woodlands for subsequent use by big game and non-game species. Although the project represents incremental intrusion of human activity into previously undeveloped woodland habitats, the proposed action would not contradict continued meeting of the Land Health Standards on a landscape scale.

**OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS:** For the following elements, only those brought forward for analysis will be addressed further.

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Access and Transportation			X
Cadastral Survey	X		
Fire Management			X
Forest Management			X
Geology and Minerals			X
Hydrology/Water Rights	X		
Law Enforcement		X	
Noise		X	
Paleontology			X
Rangeland Management			X
Realty Authorizations		X	
Recreation			X
Socio-Economics		X	
Visual Resources			X
Wild Horses	X		

## ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

*Affected Environment:* The proposed action would utilize BLM roads. The proposed project is planned for an area identified as “open seasonally” for motorized cross country travel. The area is open to cross country for the period of May 1 through September 30 and is closed to motorized cross country travel the remainder of the year. If this well is a producer, the pipeline construction that would follow could be within an area delineated as “limited to existing roads and trails” by the White River RA RMP of 1997.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* An increase in traffic can be expected during the construction phase of the pad along BLM roads. Increased heavy vehicle traffic may impact the road surface quality.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* None.

*Mitigation:* None

## **FIRE MANAGEMENT**

*Affected Environment:* The proposed well involves approximately 3.4 miles of road upgrade, new road construction of 1650 ft, and about 4.6 acres of drill pad clearing for an approximate total of 16.1 acres of disturbance in pinyon/juniper stands.

The National Fire Plan calls for “firefighter and public safety” to be the highest priority for all fire management activities. In the pinion, juniper, and brush types common on the White River Resource Area, roads and other man-made openings are commonly used as fuel breaks or barriers to control the spread of both wildland and prescribed fires. By reducing the activity fuels created from this proposal, future fire management efforts in this area should be safer for those involved and more effective.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Due to the existing tree cover of pinion and juniper, there will be a need for the operator to clear some of these trees. If not adequately treated, these trees will result in elevated hazardous fuels conditions and remain on-site for many years. These accumulations of dead material are very receptive to fire brands and spotting from wind driven fires and can greatly accelerate the rate of spread of the fire front. The road(s) associated with this project may be used by the general public for a variety of uses, including access for fire wood gathering, hunting and other dispersed recreational activities. Increased public use of an area will nearly always result in an increased potential for man-caused wildland fires. If not treated the slash and woody debris will create an elevated hazardous dead fuel loading which could pose significant control problems in the event of a wildfire. Additionally there would be greater threat to the public, ExxonMobil personnel/contractors, and fire suppression personnel.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no tree removal or disturbance to cause significant dead fuel loading.

*Mitigation:* A hydro-ax or other mulching type machine could be used to remove the trees. The machines are capable of shredding trees up to 12" in diameter and 15' tall as well as mowing brush like a conventional brush beater. It generally leaves small branches and pieces of wood from pencil size up to bowling ball size. The mulch is evenly scattered across the surface and the tires or tracks distribute the weight of the equipment. These would effectively breakdown the woody fuel and scatter the debris thereby eliminating any hazardous fuel load adjacent to the new road and well pad locations.

## **FOREST MANAGEMENT**

*Affected Environment:* Vegetation in the area of the proposed project is predominately Pinyon-juniper woodlands with an understory which is dominated by the browse species mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus montanus*) and Utah serviceberry (*Amelanchier utahensis*). These woodlands were considered within the current land use plan to be commercial, meaning that they produce commercial quantities of woodland on harvest suitable slopes. No sales have been planned for the area. There may be some local use of these woodlands for firewood and fence posts, although this use would be limited because of the lack of access.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The proposed action would remove approximately 4.6 acres of woodland associated with the well pad and 11.5 acres associated with improving and new access. These woodlands would reestablish after reclamation, with seedlings appearing on site within 10 years, saplings within 30 years and a mature canopy in 150 to 300 years. This acreage would be considered within the allowable harvest level of the Piceance Geographic Reference Area. Because of the linear nature and the volume of woodland material there is the opportunity for bark beetles to multiply to above normal populations, increasing the risk to adjacent woodlands. Chipping of the material would decrease the opportunity for a beetle outbreak. Chipping would also decrease the opportunity for a large scale fire by reducing materials available for developing/increasing fire intensities.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no impacts.

*Mitigation:* Concurrence with the mitigation outlined in the Fire Management section above.

## **GEOLOGY AND MINERALS**

*Affected Environment:* ExxonMobil's well is located in the area identified in the RMP as available for oil shale leasing. The surface geologic formation of the well location is the Uinta and ExxonMobil's targeted zone is in the Mesaverde Formation. During drilling potential water, oil shale, and gas zones will be encountered from surface to the targeted zone. Aquifers that will be encountered during drilling are the Perched in the Uinta, the A-groove, B-groove and the Dissolution Surface in the Green River formation. This area is known for difficulties in drilling and cementing through the A-groove, B-groove, the Dissolution Surface and the upper part of the Wasatch. The well is located on federal oil and gas lease COC-062041

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Drilling and completion of this well may adversely affect the aquifers if there is loss of circulation during drilling or problems cementing the casing. However, the approved cementing and completion procedure of the proposed action isolates the formations and will prevent the migration of gas, water, and oil between formations. Development of these wells will deplete the hydrocarbon resources in the targeted formation.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* None

*Mitigation:* None

## **PALEONTOLOGY**

*Affected Environment:* The proposed well pad and access road are located in an area mapped as the Uinta Formation (Tweto 1979) which the BLM has classified as a Condition I formation meaning it is known to produce scientifically important fossil resources.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* If it becomes necessary to excavate into the underlying bedrock formation to construct the road, level the well pad or construct the reserve/blooiie pit there is a potential to impact scientifically important fossil resources.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no new impacts to fossil resources under the No Action Alternative.

*Mitigation:* 1. All exposed outcrops of the Uinta formation on the well pad and access road must be inventoried for paleontological resources by an approved paleontologist and an report detailing the results of the inventory with mitigation recommendations, as appropriate, submitted to the BLM prior the initiation of construction. 2. If it becomes necessary to excavate into the underlying bedrock for any portion of road, pad or reserve/blooiie pit construction then a paleontological monitor shall be required.

## **RANGELAND MANAGEMENT**

*Affected Environment:* The proposed action occurs within the middle pasture of the Oldland Brothers use area of the Piceance Mountain allotment. This pasture is used as a spring/fall transitional area and is used primarily from late May through late June on a yearly basis. The proposed access road intersects the Bailey Ridge pasture fence.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* There will be no significant impact on Oldland grazing operation if the stated mitigation is applied.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There will be no change from the present situation.

*Mitigation:* A minimum 20 foot width cattleguard with a gate next to it which meets BLM specifications will have to be installed where the access road intersects the fence in SENE Sec 20, T 3S, R96W. Prior to cutting the fence, the necessary H braces must be installed so that the wire can be tied off to maintain proper tension. All fence work must be to BLM specifications.

## **RECREATION**

*Affected Environment:* The proposed action occurs within the White River Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA). BLM custodially manages the ERMA to provide for unstructured recreation activities such as hunting, dispersed camping, hiking, horseback riding, wildlife viewing and off-highway vehicle use.

The majority of the project area has been delineated a Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class of Rural (R). A Rural recreation setting is typically characterized by a setting that is culturally modified to the point that it is dominant to the sensitive travel route observer. This may include pastoral, agricultural, intensively managed wildland resource landscapes, or utility corridors. Pedestrian or other slow moving observers are constantly within view of culturally changed landscape. However, portions of the area are identified as either Semi-Primitive Motorized or Roaded Natural. These areas are defined by more natural settings and a decreasing likelihood of human interaction.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The public will lose approximately 16.1 acres of dispersed recreation potential while wells are in operation. The public will most likely not recreate in the vicinity of these facilities and will be dispersed elsewhere. If action coincides with hunting seasons (September through November) it will most likely disrupt the experience sought by those recreationists.

With the introduction of new well pads and roads, an increase of traffic could be expected increasing the likelihood of human interactions, the sights and sounds associated with the human environment and a less naturally appearing environment.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* No loss of dispersed recreation potential and no impact to hunting recreationists.

*Mitigation:* None.

## **VISUAL RESOURCES**

*Affected Environment:* The proposed action is located in an area with a VRM III classification. The objective of this class is to partially retain the existing character of the

landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The proposed action is located below the crest of a ridge in pinyon/juniper. Access to the area is through private land. Existing roads are in the bottoms of adjacent drainages. A casual observer would be able to view the proposed action when traveling along the adjacent ridge line approximately 1 1/2 miles distance to the west. By painting all production facilities Juniper Green to blend with and mimic the surrounding vegetation, the level of change to the characteristic landscape would be low and the objectives of the VRM III classification would be retained.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no additional environmental consequences.

*Mitigation:* Paint all production facilities Juniper Green

**CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY:** Cumulative impacts from oil and gas development were analyzed in the White River Resource Area PRMP/FEIS. Current development, including the action proposed in the analyzed action, has not exceeded the foreseeable development analyzed in the PRMP/FEIS.

If the T52X-29G1 well becomes a producing well, a pipeline will be necessary to connect the well to existing gathering lines. The pipeline that is proposed would be approximately 8 miles long, potentially disturbing an additional 40 to 50 acres, depending upon the exact route.

## REFERENCES CITED

Bott, Tracy

- 2004 Exxon-Mobil Corporation: Class III Cultural Resource Inventory for the Proposed Independence Units T52X-29G and T51X-11G: Well, Access, and Pipelines, Rio Blanco County, Colorado. Metcalf Archaeological Consultants, Inc., Eagle, Colorado.

Jennings, Calvin H.

- 1974 Report on the Archaeological Inventory of the Exploratory Drilling sites and Associated Roads, Cb Oil Shale Lease Tract. Laboratory of Public Archaeology, Department of Anthropology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado.

Tweto, Ogden

- 1979 Geologic Map of Colorado. United States Geologic Survey, Department of the Interior, Reston, Virginia.

**PERSONS / AGENCIES CONSULTED:** None

**INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Area of Responsibility</b>
Caroline Hollowed	Hydrologist	Air Quality
Tamara Meagley	Natural Resource Specialist	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Tamara Meagley	Natural Resource Specialist	Threatened and Endangered Plant Species
Michael Selle	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources Paleontological Resources
Mark Hafkenschiel	Rangeland Management Specialist	Invasive, Non-Native Species
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Migratory Birds
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Animal Species, Wildlife
Bo Brown	Hazmat Collateral	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
Caroline Hollowed	Hydrologist	Water Quality, Surface and Ground Hydrology and Water Rights
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Wetlands and Riparian Zones
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness
Caroline Hollowed	Hydrologist	Soils
Mark Hafkenschiel	Rangeland Management Specialist	Vegetation
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife Terrestrial and Aquatic
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Access and Transportation
Ken Holsinger	Natural Resource Specialist	Fire Management
Robert Fowler	Forester	Forest Management
Paul Daggett	Mining Engineer	Geology and Minerals
Mark Hafkenschiel	Rangeland Management Specialist	Rangeland Management
Penny Brown	Realty Specialist	Realty Authorizations
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation
Keith Whitaker	Natural Resource Specialist	Visual Resources
Valerie Dobrich	Natural Resource Specialist	Wild Horses

# **Finding of No Significant Impact/Decision Record (FONSI/DR)**

## **CO-110-2004-204-EA**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)/RATIONALE:** The environmental assessment and analyzing the environmental effects of the proposed action have been reviewed. The approved mitigation measures (listed below) result in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

**DECISION/RATIONALE:** It is my decision to approve the APD for the Independence Unit T52X-29G1 well, as proposed, for the well pad and access road only. The pipeline route will receive further review, and will be the subject of a subsequent environmental assessment. The proposed action is in conformance with all applicable decisions in the White River RMP, and would not be expected to result in unnecessary or undue degradation of the public lands or resources.

### **MITIGATION MEASURES:**

1. In the event project implementation is delayed beyond April 1, 2005, supplemental woodland raptor surveys in areas potentially influenced by construction and drilling operations would be required prior to initiating surface disturbance.
2. Require water spreading on the road surfaces to control fugitive dust and to help minimize short-term impacts.
3. The operator is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the operator as to:
  - whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
  - the mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not necessary)
  - a timeframe for the AO to complete an expedited review under 36 CFR 800-11 to confirm, through the State Historic Preservation Officer, that the findings of the AO are correct and that mitigation is appropriate.

If the operator wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the operator will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will then be allowed to resume construction.

4. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g) the holder of this authorization shall notify the AO, by telephone, with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), you must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.

5. The operator shall collect and properly dispose of any solid wastes generated by the proposed actions.

6. All disturbed areas including the cut and fill slopes not necessary for production will be promptly recontoured. All such areas and topsoil stockpiles shall promptly be revegetated with the native seed mix specified below. Seeding rates are PLS (Pure Live Seed) and apply to drill seeding. For broadcast application, double the seeding rate and then harrow to insure seed coverage. The operator shall be responsible for eradicating cheatgrass and noxious and problem weeds should they occur as a result of the approved action. The applicant will use materials and methods authorized in advance by the White River Field Manager.

Native Seed Mix # 3 lbs/PLS		
Western wheatgrass (Rosanna)	2	Gravelly 10"-14",
Bluebunch wheatgrass (Secar)	2	Pinyon/Juniper
Thickspike wheatgrass (Critana)	2	Woodland, Stony
Indian ricegrass (Rimrock)	1	Foothills, 147
Fourwing saltbush (Wytana)	1	(Mountain
Utah sweetvetch	.5	Mahogany)
Alternates: Needle and thread, globemallow		

7. A hydro-ax or other mulching type machine shall be used to remove the trees necessary for access and pad construction.

8. All exposed outcrops of the Uinta formation on the well pad and access road must be inventoried for paleontological resources by an approved paleontologist and an report detailing the results of the inventory with mitigation recommendations, as appropriate, submitted to the BLM prior the initiation of construction. If it becomes necessary to excavate into the underlying bedrock for any portion of road, pad or reserve/bloolie pit construction then a paleontological monitor shall be required.

9. A minimum 20 foot width cattleguard with a gate next to it which meets BLM specifications will be installed where the access road intersects the fence in SENE Sec 20, T 3S, R96W.

10. Prior to cutting the fence, the necessary H braces must be installed so that the wire can be tied off to maintain proper tension. All fence work must be to BLM specifications.

11. All permanent above-ground facilities shall be painted Juniper Green, or equivalent.

**COMPLIANCE/MONITORING:**

**NAME OF PREPARER:** Vern Rholi

**NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR:** Caroline Hollowed

**SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:**   
Field Manager

**DATE SIGNED:** 12/03/04

**ATTACHMENTS:** Location map of the proposed action.

# Location of Proposed Action CO-110-2004-204-EA

